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PSB OP 103 Excavation Report

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Site 103

Site 103 consists of 11 constructions situated approximately 88m west of Site 102 and 102m south of Site 104. Seven of these buildings are grouped around a patio the northwest corner of which remains unobstructed while the remainder are arranged in pairs (Str. 103-1 and 2) or found singly (the rest) southeast and northwest of the patio. Four buildings were excavated by a crew of six men over the course of five days, yielding a total of 30 person-days of expended labor. Three of these edifices are part of the Site 103 patio (Strs. 103-3, 6, and 7) while the fourth investigated platform lies ca. 43m southeast of that aggregate (Str. 103-1). A single test-pit, measuring 1m on a side, was also excavated in an area west of the Site 103 patio where a relatively dense concentration of lithic debris was noted on the surface. A total of 33m² was uncovered during the investigations which were overseen by Richard Paine and Edward Schortman.

Structure 103-1

Structure 103-1 lies approximately 43m southeast of the Site 103 patio where it is paired with the much smaller Str. 103-2. The former platform was investigated by means of two trenches, each 1m wide east-west, set up on the approximate center of the building's north and south faces (both grouped under Subop. 103E). The northern trench measures 1.75m north-south and was carried down to a maximum depth of 0.49m outside construction while its southern counterpart is 2.07m long and was excavated to a depth of 0.39m beyond construction. A single construction phase was revealed in these limited probes.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span</u>
103E/1	? artifacts	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2
103E/2	65 sherds 90 <u>jute</u> shells	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2
103E/3	57 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2
103E/4	? artifacts	Mixed Fill and Occupation Debris	1,2
103E/5	93 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2
103E/6	90 sherds 1 chert piece 1 lithic 1 <u>metate</u> fragment	Mixed Fill and Occupation Debris	2

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1,2	-	?
2	Str. 103-1-1st	U.1-5	-	-	LC, EPC
3	-	-	S.2	F.1,2	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a light brown, fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted earth level, underlies construction on both the north and south sides of Str. 103-1-1st. This layer was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.23m though its base was not encountered. Stratum 1 descends gradually north of the platform, dropping 0.12m over a distance of 1.06m. The location of S.1 is not as clear south, as it is north, of Str. 103-1-1st. The lower 0.04-0.05m of S.2, burying S.1, were most likely deposited during TS.1 as well. This view is suggested by the stratigraphic position of two late additions to Str. 103-1-1st, U.4 and 5, which are set within S.2 0.04-0.05m above S.1. Stratum 2 is a dark brown, fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted soil.

Time Span 2

Structure 103-1-1st was originally delimited by U.1 and 2 on the north and south respectively. The former is a 0.23m-high cobble wall set 0.15m into S.1 and the lower portion of S.2 (see TS.1). Unit 2, the southern basal stone facing, rises 0.17m and extends 0.07m into S.1 and lower S.2. The southern wall is succeeded on the north by a cobble pavement which extends at least 0.46m to the limits of excavation. No more of Str. 103-1-1st's summit was revealed, though it appears that U.1 and 2 provided direct access to the building's top. Structure 103-1-1st was subsequently enlarged on the north and south through the construction of two stone-faced additions (U.5 and 4 respectively). Units 4 and 5 are 0.15m and 0.16m high risers faced by low cobble walls and backed by stone-and-earth fill (the soil is indistinguishable from S.2). These renovations extended Str. 103-1-1st 0.38m northward and 0.68m to the south. Unit 1 may have still protruded 0.07m above the northern addition. Both U.4 and 5 were so poorly preserved that it was not possible to reconstruct their original orientations.

Structure 103-1-1st, therefore, began as a stone-faced platform 0.17-0.23m high, measuring 4.6m across north-south, and oriented 78-82 degrees. During its final period of use the building covered 5.66m north-south, though its height and, presumably, orientation remained unchanged.

Time Span 3

The deposition of S.2 buried most of Str. 103-1-1st in the centuries following the platform's abandonment. Incorporated within this layer is displaced architectural debris scattered north (F.1) and south (F.2) of the building. The stones comprising F.1 and 2 extend 1.2m and 0.5m away from extant construction, decreasing in density with distance from the buildings. The

moderate amounts of tumbled debris found in F.1 and 2 imply that Str. 103-1-1st suffered some damage following TS.2. Most of these displaced cobbles probably derive from the poorly preserved late additions (U.4 and 5).

Structure 103-3

Structure 103-3 is one of two buildings which closes off the east side of the Site 103 patio. This building was investigated by means of Subop. 103H, a 1m (east-west) by 6.7m (north-south) trench that bisected the building, exposing portions of the structure's northern and southern flanks as well as the summit. Suboperation 103H was carried down to a maximum depth of 0.67m outside construction on the north, revealing a single building phase.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span</u>
103H/1	8 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2
103H/2	91 sherds	Mixed Fill and Occupation Debris	1,2
103H/3	99 sherds	Terminal Debris (Primary)	2
103H/4	65 sherds 8 lithics 12 <u>bajareque</u> fragments 7 <u>jute</u> shells	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1,2
103H/5	17 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1,2	-	?
2	Str. 103-3-1st	U.1-6	-	-	LC, EPC
3	-	-	S.2	F.1,2	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a light brown, fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted soil, underlies construction on the exposed north and south flanks of Str. 103-3-1st. This level was exposed to a

maximum thickness of 0.31m north of the platform, though S.1's base was not encountered during the 1985 excavations. Stratum 1 drops off gradually south of Str. 103-3-1st, descending 0.24m over a horizontal distance of 1.7m. The lower 0.02-0.05m of S.2 were most likely deposited prior to raising Str. 103-3-1st. This interpretation is suggested by the location of the platform's north basal wall (U.1), 0.02m above the S.1/2 interface. Most likely the base of this facing was set below the extant ground surface, meaning that it would have to be intruded into S.2. Further, the distribution of the lowest stones tumbled from Str. 103-3-1st construction north and south of the platform (F.1 and 2) rest 0.02-0.05m above S.1. If these displaced rocks fell onto ground surface exposed during TS.2, then the lower 0.02-0.05m of S.2 must have been deposited prior to this initial period of collapse. Stratum 2 is identical to S.1 in all regards save color, the former having a dark brown hue. The few lots collected from S.1 and lower S.2 also included material pertaining to TS.2. We cannot, therefore, be certain that human occupation preceded the raising of Str. 103-3-1st on this spot.

Time Span 2

During the initial period of Str. 103-3-1st's use the platform was faced on the north and south by low terraces with variable widths. Unit 4, a cobble wall 0.09m high, set 0.05m into S.1, defines the south flank and gives way to a tread that is 0.29m wide (including the width of U.4 itself). From U.4 it is a 0.18m high step-up to the summit delimited on the south by a construction that is no more than one cobble high and wide (U.3, 0.05m high and 0.23m across). Unit 3 rests on dirt above U.4, no effort having been made to formalize this summit ascent with a stone facing. The northern terrace is delimited by a 0.18m high cobble wall that is backed to the south by a stone surface composed of moderately large river-rounded stones (all U.1). Unit 1, as noted above, appears to have been set 0.04-0.05m into S.2. The northern terrace is 1.06m wide and gives way to a 0.08m-high summit ascent marked by a cobble facing (U.2). The earthen summit is featureless in the portion exposed by Subop. 103H though a sizable deposit of sherds from two large ceramic jars (lot 103H/3) was found strewn across the excavated summit. Structure 103-3-1st's summit measures 1.9m across north-south. At some point during its use-life, Str. 103-3-1st was expanded 0.61m to the south. This renovation involved the construction of U.5, a 0.18m-high cobble wall set 0.04-0.08m into the down-sloping portion of S.1. The earth-and-small-stone fill backing U.5 on the north (U.6; the soil is identical to S.2) buries the previous south terrace wall (U.4). The southern terrace would now have been 0.91m wide.

Structure 103-3-1st, therefore, finally rose 0.36m on the south and 0.26m on the north, measured 3.8m north-south, and was aligned 88-90 degrees. Access to the 1.9m-wide earthen summit was most likely achieved by ascending the northern flank as this side possesses a paved terrace surface absent on the south. Structure 103-3-1st is so low, however, that it may have been possible to step up to the summit from any side.

Time Span 3

Following the abandonment of Str. 103-3-1st, the platform was buried by the deposition of S.2. Included within this soil layer is tumbled architectural debris, stones displaced from final-phase construction (F.1 and 2). Feature 1 extends for 1.05m south of the building while its northern counterpart, F.2, is found for 0.67m beyond U.1. Each feature contains a moderate amount of tumbled material, implying that Str. 103-3-1st suffered a fair amount of damage in the

years succeeding TS.2.

Structure 103-6

Structure 103-6, closing off the west side of the Site 103 patio, was investigated by four trenches set on the building's east and west flanks (Subop. 103B and C) and southwest and northeast corners (Subops. 103G and J). Together, digging these probes resulted in the exposure of 16.2m². Excavations were pursued to a maximum depth of 0.6m east of construction and 0.75m into architectural fill, revealing two construction episodes.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span</u>
103B/1	160 sherds 1 chert piece	Mixed Fill and Occupation Debris	1,2,3
103C/1	44 sherds	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1,2,3
103C/2	? artifacts carbon sample	Mixed Fill and Occupation Debris	1,3
103G/1	65 sherds 1 chert piece	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3
103G/2	78 sherds 2 chert pieces	Mixed Fill and Occupation Debris	3
103G/3	73 sherds 3 lithics	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3
103J/1	1 <u>metate</u> fragment	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	2,3

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	Str. 103-6-2nd	U.1	-	F.1	?
2	-	-	S.1,2	-	-
3	Str. 103-6-1st	U.2-5	-	-	LC, EPC
4	-	-	S.2	-	-

Time Span 1

The first activity identified by the Str. 103-6 excavations was the deposition of U.1. This red-brown, sandy, hard-compacted soil containing a relatively large number of sherds underlies Str. 103-6-1st's east and west basal walls. Unit 1 rises markedly from east and west towards the center, ascending 0.5m over 1.8m on the west and 0.45m over 1.6m on the east. Naturally deposited soils revealed in excavation exhibit more level profiles (S.1 and 2), suggesting that U.1 was introduced artificially. Unit 1, therefore, appears to be an earthen mound rising at least 0.5m above an undetermined ground surface (U.1's base was not uncovered during excavation). Assuming that Subops. 103B and C revealed the east and west flanks of U.1, the earthen mound measured (minimally) 6.9m east-west. No stone walls designed to retain the U.1 fill were identified.

At some point following U.1's deposition, F.1 was intruded ca. 0.26m into the mound's east flank. Feature 1 is a stack of cobbles 0.4m high and 0.2m wide (one stone thick). This apparent construction element was identified solely in Subop. 103B's south trench wall; it did not continue north of that point but may have extended southward into unexcavated areas. The architectural and behavioral significance of F.1 is unknown.

Time Span 2

Following U.1's abandonment it was buried by the deposition of S.1 and the lower 0.08-0.1m of S.2. The former is a light brown, fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted soil exposed to a maximum depth of 0.23m (the stratum's base was not encountered in our probes). Stratum 1 laps up over and buries the lower exposed slope of U.1. Stratum 2 is identical to its stratigraphic predecessor in all ways save color, S.2 having a dark brown hue. This subsequent earth level also buries portions of U.1 and underlies Str. 103-6-1st construction by 0.08-0.1m. It is on the bases of these stratigraphic relations that we propose that the bottom-most centimeters of S.2 were laid down prior to the raising of Str. 103-6-1st.

Time Span 3

Structure 103-6-1st was subsequently raised over the U.1 construction though whether the builders were aware of the earlier edifice is uncertain. Unit 2, defining the platform's west flank, is a 0.17m-high by 0.32m-thick cobble wall. Unit 3, the eastern basal facing, is comparably built, rising 0.24m high and measuring 0.64m thick. Both units are backed by an earthen fill (U.5) indistinguishable from S.2. The platform's summit was not investigated so we remain at a loss to describe its form and determine the building's total height. A cobble surface was built off Str. 103-6-1st's southwest corner (U.4). This pavement was not fully exposed, but runs at least 0.8m west, 1.1m east, and 1.5m south of the corner, possibly linking Str. 103-6-1st with Str. 103-7-1st ca. 3m to the south.

Structure 103-6-1st is a 0.17-0.24m-high (minimally) earth-filled, stone-faced platform measuring approximately 5.55m east-west by 6.25m north-south and aligned 352 to 357 degrees. A cobble pavement may have linked this edifice with its smaller southern neighbor, Str. 103-7-1st.

Time Span 4

Following abandonment of Str. 103-6-1st, the platform was encased within S.2. Only a light scattering of displaced building stones was noted east and west of the building, implying that Str. 103-6-1st suffered only minor disturbances after TS.3.

Structure 103-7

Structure 103-7, roughly 3m south of Str. 103-6, marks the southern limit of the Site 103 patio. This platform was investigated by means of two trenches set against Str. 103-7's east (Subop. 103D) and west flanks (Subop. 103F). The former trench measures 1m north-south by 3.2m east-west while the latter encompasses 1m north-south by 1.94m east-west. Excavations were carried down to a maximum depth of 0.42m through construction fill into an underlying occupation level, unearthing a single construction episode.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span</u>
103D/1	? artifacts	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1,2
103D/2	112 sherds 2 censer fragments	Mixed Fill and Occupation Debris	2
103F/1	211 sherds 2 obsidian pieces 52 <u>jute</u> shells	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1,2
103F/2	1 reconstructable vessel (13 sherds)	Terminal Debris (Primary)	2

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1,2	-	-
2	Str. 103-7-1st	U.1-4	-	-	LC, EPC
3	-	-	S.3	F.1,2	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1 buries the bases of, and underlies, Str. 103-7-1st construction on the east and

west. This light brown, fine-textured, hard-compacted soil descends gradually from west to east, dropping 0.19m over a horizontal distance of 1.6m. Stratum 1 was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.19m west of construction though its base was not exposed by our excavations. Stratum 2 is found beneath, but not beyond, TS.2 construction. This red-brown, sandy, hard-compacted soil is identical to the U.3 fill which overlies it, making it impossible to distinguish between these two elements. The restriction of S.2 to areas underlying Str. 103-7-1st suggests that this earth level either represents a low natural rise atop which the platform was raised or the remnants of a small earthen platform comparable to the U.1 construction identified beneath Str. 103-6-1st. The data in hand are insufficient to decide among these alternatives.

Time Span 2

Structure 103-7-1st is defined on the east and west by cobble facings 0.16m and 0.19m high (U.1 and 2 respectively) set deep within S.1 (0.19m and 0.15m in turn). These walls are backed by earth fill (U.3), primarily a red-brown, sandy, hard-compacted soil. Unit 3 grades upward into a dark brown, fine-textured, hard-compacted earth identical to the overlying S.3 (this fill unit is clearest beneath U.4). The earthen summit floor is marked on the west by lot 103F/2, a nearly complete overturned ceramic vessel found resting on a surface of earth and scattered stones ca. 0.15m below the top, and 0.78m east, of U.2. Lot 103F/2 was surrounded by U.3 earth, possibly eroding out from summit construction to the east. Unit 4 is an east-west running wall the westernmost stone of which overlaps with and is incorporated within U.2. This unit stands a reconstructed 0.2m above the putative floor marked by lot 103F/2 and is built of earth (the dark brown soil portion of U.3) capped with a line of stones. Unit 4 is 0.55m wide and runs at least 1.36m east-west (the eastern terminus was not revealed). The architectural significance of U.4 remains uncertain; it may be a foundation separating summit rooms. Fully 1.14m in the approximate center of the building was not excavated precluding further description of summit form.

Structure 103-7-1st is a 0.16-0.19m-high earth-filled, stone-faced platform measuring 3.56m east-west and oriented 4-12 degrees. Rising above the earthen summit floor is what is probably a foundation demarcating enclosures within the superstructure.

Time Span 3

After abandonment, Str. 103-7-1st was buried by the deposition of S.3, a dark brown, fine-textured, hard-compacted soil. A light scattering of cobbles displaced from Str. 103-7-1st extends for 1.22m east (F.1) and for at least 0.5m west (F.2) of construction, largely within S.3. The paucity of tumbled stones implies that the platform suffered little disturbance in the centuries following TS.2.

Test Pit

Suboperation 103K is a 1x1m test pit excavated ca. 38.5m west of Str. 103-6 near the sheer descent to the Rio Ulua. This area was tested because it was one of the few portions of Site 103 that yielded artifacts on the surface and it was hoped that work here would reveal an activity locus unassociated with surface-visible architecture. Digging was carried down to a maximum depth of 0.69m revealing a red-brown, sandy, hard-compacted soil (S.1) overlain by a

dark brown, fine-textured, hard-compacted earth level 0.25-0.3m thick (S.2). Stratum 1's base was not encountered. Only a few artifacts, sherds and obsidian, were recovered, and those were restricted to S.2. No architecture, in fact no clear activity locus, was revealed in Subop. 103K. Most likely, the surface collection, and few subsurface artifacts, represent debris washing out of richer deposits elsewhere at the settlement.

Chronological Summary

Site 103 appears to have been occupied solely during the Late Classic and Early Postclassic. Every excavated building gives evidence of having been used during both spans. Late Classic diagnostics are somewhat more prevalent on and around Strs. 103-3-1st and 103-6-1st while the reverse is true for Str. 103-7-1st (numbers are nearly equal at Str. 103-1-1st). For the moment, it would appear that the investigated buildings may have been raised during the Late Classic, probably near the end of that span, with significant occupation persisting in each case into the Early Postclassic. It seems likely that renovations noted on Strs. 103-1-1st and 103-3-1st were made during the latter interval. There is no evidence for the continued use of Site 103 during any subsequent prehistoric or historic era.

Architectural Summary

All of the excavated buildings are platforms the earthen cores of which are faced with low cobble retaining walls. These facings are fashioned of river cobbles, mostly basalt, set in a mud mortar. None of the stones seem to have been artificially shaped and the effort devoted to orienting their naturally flatter surfaces outward was variable. The rocks measure 0.09-0.31m in diameter. In three of the four excavated buildings basal walls give way directly to the summit. Only Str. 103-3-1st has evidence of terraces, 0.29-1.06m wide, surmounted by low stone step-ups to the summit. Little is known about superstructure construction save that the top of Str. 103-3-1st appears to have been featureless while Str. 103-7-1st supported a low stone-and-earth unit which may have served as a room divider (U.4). Summit constructions, where they existed, were almost certainly fashioned of perishable materials as no standing masonry was recorded during excavation or visible on the surface. Most exposed summit and terrace surfaces were earthen with the exceptions of the stone pavements noted on the northern Str. 103-3-1st and southern Str. 103-1-1st terraces. Renovations to existing buildings take the form of poorly constructed cobble-faced and cobble-and-earth-filled additions appended onto the basal walls (Str. 103-1-1st) or terrace (Str. 103-3-1st) of an earlier platform. These constructions largely buried pre-existing walls and expanded the building's horizontal dimensions by 0.38-0.68m. Platforms were generally low, rising 0.16-0.36m, and measured 3.56-6.25m across their longest, exposed dimension. The single building for which basal dimensions could be reconstructed (Str. 103-6-1st) covers 5.55x6.25m. Structure alignments cluster in the range from 78-102 degrees, with most falling between 78-94 degrees. The only formalized extramural surface is the cobble floor (U.4) situated off Str. 103-6-1st's southwest corner. Stones employed in this construction measure 0.12-0.22m. As noted previously, this pavement may have linked Strs. 103-6-1st and 103-7-1st.

A possible earthen mound, ca. 0.5m high and covering 6.9m east-west, was found underlying Str. 103-6-1st (U.1). Another, much smaller earthen platform may be found beneath Str. 103-7-1st. Such constructions, lacking stone-facings, are rarely attested in excavations

within the middle Rio Ulua drainage.